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Biometrics Office Focused On Aiding War Fighters

The Defense Department's Biometrics Management Office (BMO) was created with the idea it would help increase the security of information systems and installations used by DoD personnel but the advent of the Global War on Terrorism changed that so that now the primary focus of the office is supporting war fighters, says John Woodward, director of the BMO.

The shift in priorities was solidified last fall when **Lockheed Martin** [LMT] won a five year contract from DoD to develop a new Automated Biometric Identification System (ABIS) that will collect certain biometrics, initially fingerprints and mug shots, from captured enemy combatants and detainees.

The information collected from any enemy captured will be searched against all detainee records to see if the person has been detained before and then also it will be shared with the FBI to search against their fingerprint data base, called Integrated Automated Fingerprint Identification System, says Woodward.

So far ABIS has been "making a real difference" in the War on Terror, he says. Biometric data has been used to "identify individuals in military custody as former detainees" and in some cases, to "find that these people had criminal histories in the United States," he says. The data has also been used to "identify some dangerous national security threats," he adds.

Soldiers don't have instant access to the ABIS database but the BMO is working to push the capability further out and to make it more responsive, he says.

Plans this year call for expanding ABIS to have facial recognition and iris scanning capabilities to be able to do large scale searches, Woodward says.

Navy Efforts

Another key effort the BMO is assisting is helping the Navy employ biometric capture capabilities on the high seas as part of the service's Maritime Interception Operations (MIO). On its website, the BMO has a video of a team of Navy personnel boarding a merchant vessel and collecting ink-based fingerprints from the merchantmen.

The Navy is also using live scan fingerprint technology, which it is "very interested in," for the demonstrations, Woodward says. The service is going through an "aggressive test phase," with the biometrics, he says.

The Navy's interest in biometrics goes to the top.

"To help enhance MIO in support of the GWOT (Global War on Terrorism), the Navy requires a capability to collect biometrics data and to globally share information collected during boarding operations," according to a Jan. 18 memorandum from Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Vern Clark to various Naval offices. "The resourcing plan will provide for the establishment and sustainment of a biometrics capability across the Navy that will enhance Fleet Forces Command's current efforts to expeditiously field a biometrics capability in the fleet."

In the memo, Clark also says the command must identify requirements by the end of this month for an information infrastructure to support the MIOs for "information sharing between Fleets and Coalition Forces."

The ABIS and MIO efforts are for Red Force purposes, assessing captured enemy combatants and detainees for possible national security threats while adding to the biometrics data base. Another major initiative getting underway is aimed at Blue, or friendly, Forces, to enhance the integrity of the process for moving enlistees through the Military Entrance Processing Command (*TR2*, Jan. 26).

If the MEPCOM demonstration is successful, it will likely be expanded throughout the command, says Woodward. Moreover, if successful, "I think that will be the barometer that other

military organizations will look to."

The BMO also has some smaller initiatives underway. One is a technology demonstration with the Army to ensure better access control on the battlefield. And "We will continue to use biometrics to help improve force protection, to make certain the person who accesses an installation is authorized to be on that installation," he says.

Biometrics Trends

Asked about some of the key trends in the biometrics technology arena, Woodward says that one exciting area is advances in multi-modality, or fusion, which involves using two or more biometrics from a person to enhance reliability and improve processing speed. While there is a lot of interest in fusion, and "intuitively it seems like it makes sense," he says there are challenges.

If I have a good fingerprint but a lousy facial photograph, the poor biometric "might just weigh down the excellent biometric," he says. This could then create doubt, he notes.

The most popular biometric used throughout DoD currently is fingerprints, Woodward says, citing the preliminary findings of DoD-wide survey, formally known as a "Data Call," conducted by Lt. Gen. Steven Boutelle, the Army's executive agent for biometrics, Woodward says. So far the results show that over half of the biometric applications are using fingerprints, he says. The survey is ongoing and Woodward cautions that the results could change.

Next in line, with just over 10 percent of the applications is hand geometry, which Woodward describes as the "Old Faithful of biometrics" and is commonly used for physical access. The BMO partially underwrote a pilot project at Scott Air Force Base near St. Louis, Mo., that was conducted in 2003 using a hand geometry system for base access. A report published by Woodward earlier this year and found on the BMO's website says officials at Scott AFB considered the project a success due to the system's accuracy, reliability and ease of use. He also says researchers from West Virginia University who analyzed the pilot found significant cost savings largely due to the redeployment of security guards.

Third in popularity among biometrics is iris recognition, which is being used in less than 10 percent of applications, he says.